

Overview

Summary

In 1893, the fictional Jewish Markowitz family leaves Russia for the promise of religious freedom and prosperity in America. Through fictional journal entries and letters based on historical accounts, the Markowitz family members share their experiences. At Ellis Island, the family is given the name “Marks.” From there the family makes its way to the Lower East Side of New York City. Hard work and family unity help each family member adjust to life in America. The Marks family soon realizes that there is discrimination everywhere, including America. But they also realize that in America, they are free to pursue the American dream: education, employment, freedom of speech, and prosperity. For the Marks, America is the land of opportunity, and it becomes their home.

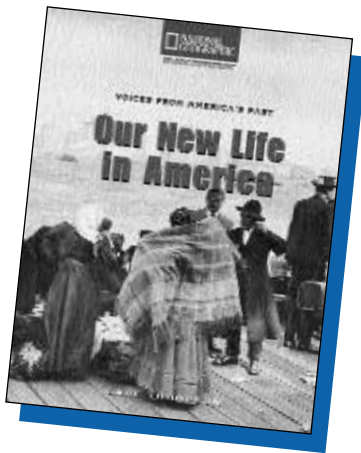
Background Information

Before 1890, most immigrants to the United States had come from western and northern Europe. From the 1880s until 1920, a wave of “new immigrants” arrived from eastern and southern Europe. Most of these new immigrants came to escape religious persecution, poverty, and political repression. The persecution of Jews forced to live in the Russian Pale, led to mass migrations of whole villages. Terrorized by pogroms and denied educational and economic opportunities, Jews fled Russia, Poland, and other countries in eastern Europe in search of a better life in America. To escape, many eastern European Jews paid guides to get them to Hamburg, Germany, or Odessa, Russia, where they bought tickets on sailing ships to the United States.

Our New Life in America

The Marks Family Lives the American Dream

By Gare Thompson



Learning Objectives

Genre/Text Features

- first-person narrative/letters and diaries
- expository
- historical photographs
- captions
- map
- contents and glossary

Reading Skills

Skill Focus

- identify main idea and details
- determine word knowledge

Supporting Skills

- summarize
- compare and contrast
- draw conclusions
- self-question

Writing Skills

Writing Focus

- write a newspaper article (expository)

Supporting Skills

- prewrite
- conduct research
- connect ideas

Speaking and Listening

- give oral presentation

Social Studies Skills

- reconstruct the past from immigrants' perspective
- explain why immigrants came to America
- identify economic systems, including specialized workers
- identify opportunities for and rights and responsibilities of Americans
- explain the role of unions

Focus on Reading

Before Reading

Activate Prior Knowledge

Explain to students that they will be reading about a family that moves from Russia to America in the 1890s. Locate Russia and New York City on a map and discuss the distance between them. Ask students what it would be like to move to a place they'd never been before and where the language is different from their own.

Ask:

Why might a family move to a place they've never been before?

What might a family find difficult about living in the new country? What might they find exciting?

Write students' ideas on the chalkboard. Have students copy the following chart into their notebooks and complete it with partners. Then discuss students' ideas. Students can add to their charts after reading the book.

Preview

Give students time to preview the book by looking at the photographs, reading the captions, and reading the chapter titles. Ask:

Will you be reading about the present time? What makes you think as you do?

What time period will you be reading about? What clues help you figure this out?

Set Purpose

Ask students whether this book reminds them of other books they have read. Help students set a purpose for reading. Ask:

What do you hope to find out by reading this book?

Encourage students to give reasons for their answers. Model your own purpose for reading, if necessary.

Moving to a New Country

Reasons to Move	Advantages of Moving	Disadvantages of Moving

Correlation to National Standards

Language Arts

- read to build an understanding of the cultures of the United States
- apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend and interpret texts
- use spoken and written language for learning
- use the writing process
- use language to accomplish their own purposes

Social Studies

- time, continuity, and change
- individuals, groups, and institutions
- power, authority, and governance
- production, distribution, and consumption

Geography

- world in spatial terms (2)
- places and regions (4, 6)
- human systems (9, 12)
- uses of geography (17)

State/Local

See Standards Chart on pages 282–287.

Focus on Reading (continued)

Vocabulary Strategy: Determine word knowledge **Activity Master, Page 220**

Turn to page 4 and point out the word *immigrants*. Ask students what they know about this word and write their ideas on the board. Relate the word to people moving from Russia to the United States at the turn of the century. Explain that students will work with other words that they are to relate to the topic of the book. On the Activity Master, have students write a definition for each word. Then, as they read, have them write a sentence that relates each word to the topic of *Our New Life in America*. Students will be using these words:

adapt	sweatshop
immigrant	tenement
pogrom	traditions
steerage	union

During Reading

Read Strategically: Identify main ideas and details **Activity Master, Page 221**

Assign each chapter of the book as independent reading. Have students use the Activity Master on page 221 as a study guide to help them identify main ideas and details of each chapter. On the master, students provide supporting details for the main ideas of Chapters 1–4. They write both a main idea and details for Chapter 5. Remind students

that to find the main idea, they should ask what the chapter is all about. They might turn each main idea statement into a question and then read to find details to answer the question.

Strategy Tip: Self-question
Remind students to ask themselves questions as they read, especially if they are having difficulty understanding the text. For example, they might ask:

Do I understand that the book describes a time in the past?

Do I understand that the story is told by different members of the Marks family?

What did the move to America mean to each member of the family?

How was life in America different from life in Russia?

Students can reread with their questions in mind.

Meeting Individual Needs

For specific strategies on meeting individual needs, see pages 264–269.

After Reading

Responding

Initiate a class discussion to assess reading comprehension with such questions as:

Why did the Markowitz family move to America? (cause and effect)

What challenges did they face in America? (summarize)

How did life in Russia compare to life in America? (compare and contrast)

How did the family try to become “more American”? (draw conclusions)

What Russian Jewish traditions did the Marks family practice in America? (main idea and details)

Writing and Research: Write a newspaper article **Activity Master, Page 222**

Tell students they are reporters for the *Jewish Daily Forward* newspaper. They are to write an article to help Jewish immigrants adjust to life in New York City. In their articles, students should describe various resources and important places in the Lower East Side. Students may want to conduct research to find out more about life in the Lower East Side during this time period. Students can use the Activity Master on page 222 to help them organize their ideas for writing.

Communicating: Speaking/listening

Give oral presentation

In small groups, students can read their articles aloud.

Students reading aloud should

- ✓ speak clearly
- ✓ make eye contact with listeners
- ✓ adapt speech as appropriate, such as in emphasizing important ideas

Listeners should

- ✓ determine the main ideas
- ✓ listen politely
- ✓ ask questions to clarify ideas they didn't understand

Focus on Social Studies

Illustrate New Opportunities

“Not all things are good, but many are,” says Jacob Marks of America. From access to public libraries to the right to demonstrate in unions, the U. S. government offered immigrants freedom and opportunity. Students can create a collage showing two freedoms, rights, or opportunities the Marks family gained by moving to America. Students can use words and pictures from newspapers or magazines, or they can draw the pictures themselves.



Activity Master, Page 223

Students can use the Activity Master and *Our New Life in America* to sketch and label a map of the Lower East Side where the Marks lived. Remind students that their maps will be different from other students' maps because they are sketching maps based on general locations discussed in the book.

Assessment Options

Use the following assessment options.

Questions

Ask the following questions during individual conferences or ask students to write the answers in their notebooks:

- 1 What were three reasons many Russian Jews immigrated to America between 1880 and 1920?
- 2 What hardships did the immigrants endure on the journey?
- 3 What were two ways the Marks family tried to adapt to life in America?
- 4 How did life improve for the Marks after coming to America?
- 5 Was life in America perfect? Why or why not?

Assessment Activity

Ask students to choose a character from the story and show one way that character lived “the American dream.” Students can either create an illustration or write a short essay to describe their ideas. Students creating illustrations should write three sentences that describe/explain their ideas.

Pictures and sentences should

- ✓ clearly illustrate the “American dream” of one character

Essays should

- ✓ present information clearly and succinctly
- ✓ explain the character's accomplishments

Multiple-Choice Test

Use the multiple-choice test in the Assessment Booklet.

Cross-Curricular Connection

Mathematics

In the student book, Sasha joins a union that is trying to increase workers' wages. During this time period, some factory owners grew wealthy as their laborers worked for

low wages. To give them perspective on what the unions were fighting for, have students use the data listed below to answer questions such as:

How much did the average worker make in one day? In one week? In one month?

If rent for an apartment averaged \$40 a month, about what percent of a laborer's monthly wage went for rent? What did that leave for food and other necessities?

A Laborer

- worked 16 hours a day
- 7 days a week
- for about 25 cents an hour

Home-School Connection

Students can describe the Marks family to parents, including their basic needs, concerns, and hopes and dreams. Then students and their parents can compare their own family to the Marks family. A simple checklist will help students and parents focus their comparisons.

- ✓ school
- ✓ work
- ✓ foods
- ✓ holidays
- ✓ traditions
- ✓ entertainment
- ✓ concerns
- ✓ hopes and dreams

Vocabulary: Determine Word Knowledge

The words below are from *Our New Life in America*. You may already know some of these words. In the first column, write what you already know about each word. Then use *Our New Life in America* and the glossary to find new information about each word. Write a sentence that relates each word to what happens to the Marks family.

Word	What I Already Know	My Sentence About the Marks Family
adapt		
immigrant		
pogrom		
steerage		
sweatshop		
tenement		
traditions		
union		

Reading: Identify Main Ideas and Details

The main idea of a chapter is what the chapter is mostly about. Details are facts and examples that explain a main idea. Finish the chart below with details and main ideas.

Chapter 1	Main Idea: <i>The Markowitz family is forced to flee Russia.</i>
Details	
•	
•	

Chapter 2	Main Idea: <i>The journey to America is difficult.</i>
Details	
•	
•	

Chapter 3	Main Idea: <i>The family works hard to adjust to their new life.</i>
Details	
•	
•	

Chapter 4	Main Idea: <i>The family follows both Russian Jewish and American traditions.</i>
Details	
•	
•	

Chapter 5	Main Idea:
Details	
•	
•	

Writing: Prewriting

A Newspaper Article

The year is 1896. You are a reporter for the *Jewish Daily Forward* newspaper. You are to write an article that will help new immigrants adapt to life in the Lower East Side. Your article will help the immigrants feel better about their new community. Organize information for your article below.

What do immigrants need to know about this new community?

Choose three of the following topics to include in your article. For each of the three topics you choose, explain what it is and how it can help the immigrants.

Hebrew Trade Union _____

Educational Alliance _____

The *Jewish Daily Forward* _____

City College _____

Hester Street Markets _____

Elementary School _____

Other topics _____

My Title: _____

My "grabber" first sentence and first paragraph: _____

Social Studies: Sketch a Map

Use *Our New Life in America* to sketch a map of the neighborhood where the Marks lived. First picture the neighborhood in your mind. Read the guidelines below and then sketch your map in the space provided on this page.

Sketching Guidelines

1. Are there mostly apartments or houses in this neighborhood?
How will you show this?
2. Include the following places on your map: Hester Street, the public library, factories, the Marks' apartment, the Yiddish theater.
3. Create a key for your map and include labels as appropriate.

